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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 001034

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FROM THE AMBASSADOR FOR DIRECTOR ROBERT MUELLER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/20/2017

TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR DIRECTOR MUELLER'S VISIT TO MOROCCO

Classified by Ambassador Thomas Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Overview

¶1. (C) My staff and I are delighted to welcome you to Morocco at a time of increased focus on the terrorist threat in North Africa. The U.S. finds in Morocco a capable and active partner in the war against terror, though there is still room for closer cooperation and enhanced support from our side for the country's CT efforts. In the past three years, the GOM has wrapped up a steadily increasing number of extremist cells preparing to conduct attacks. The fact that the Moroccans have so far succeeded in preempting major attacks is reassuring, but the apparently multiplying number of nascent terror cells and suicide bombers is not.

¶2. (C) The GOM is pursuing an interdisciplinary approach to fighting terror, seeking to address the economic marginalization of youth and refute extremist ideology by propagating Islamic messages of tolerance and moderation as it pursues law enforcement and intelligence operations against specific terror cells. Progress on the ideological and economic fronts can only be realized over the mid- to long-terms.

¶3. (C) However important, CT is certainly not the only issue on the minds of the Moroccan leadership this summer: There have been major diplomatic developments in the long-stalelated Western Sahara conflict: In mid-June, two days of direct talks between Morocco and the separatist Polisario Front ended in agreement to meet again. Morocco is also preparing for its first direct legislative elections in five years, to be held in September. A legal Islamist party is poised to make significant gains, though most observers expect only limited impact on Morocco's political system, as power remains concentrated in the hands of the Royal Palace.

¶4. (C) Your meetings with senior GOM officials constitute an opportunity to thank the Moroccans for their cooperation, particularly their efforts to protect U.S. diplomatic facilities in Rabat and Casablanca, and applaud their efforts on CT. You can also congratulate them on their robust and effective efforts to combat narcotics production and urge them to provide us with specific proposals for enhanced assistance in areas such as bomb detection and disposal, and border controls.

Suicide Bombing Series in Casablanca

¶5. (C) A spate of abortive suicide bomb attacks in Casablanca

this March and April, including two directly targeting U.S. interests, constituted a rude wake up call for the Moroccan public, and some in the leadership as well, which had seen no significant terrorist attacks since a series of coordinated bombings in Casablanca killed 45 persons on May 16, 2003. A total of 10 Moroccan suicide bombers either detonated themselves, were killed by police, or were captured in a series of incidents in Casablanca in March and April. On April 10, two brothers detonated themselves, one in front of the American Consulate-General in Casablanca, the other at the nearby American Language Center, apparently mistaken for a USG facility. No links have been established between any of the bombers and transnational terror networks. The bombers appear to have come from small, autonomous, home-grown cells inspired by radical jihadist ideology.

¶6. (C) Thanks to luck and the obvious ineptitude of the bombers, no civilians were hurt in the attacks (one Moroccan policeman was killed in action during a raid). Given the direct targeting of USG facilities, and the knowledge that more extremists were at large, we closed the Consulate-General building until the GOM took enhanced security measures, specifically to protect the building from the threat of a vehicle-borne bomb, which they did after a delay of almost two months.

The Broader Regional Threat

¶7. (C) The Casablanca incidents more or less coincided this spring with news of the merger of the Algerian GSPC terror group with Al-Qaida to form Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The franchise was announced in messages from both

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Algerian Jihadist Abdelmalek Droukdal and Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Osama Bin Laden's deputy. The impact on Morocco of this development is still unclear, though it has been broadly interpreted as an incorporation of all of North Africa into Al-Qaida's theater of operations. Some Moroccans participate in the GSPC/AQIM, which is mainly holed up in remote and mobile camps in southern Algeria, Mali, and Mauritania. Senior Moroccan officials have told us of their concern about the Sahara/Sahel region's potential as a terrorist safe-haven and base of operations. This threat led to the formation several years ago of the USG's Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), though so far TSCTP assistance, mostly DOD, has been principally directed toward the Sahel states.

Multiplying Domestic Cells

¶8. (C) Though there has so far been little known GSPC or Al-Qaida activities inside Morocco, there has been a steady increase in the past three years in the number of jihadist cells dismantled by the Moroccan government as they organized to conduct terror attacks. The details of most of these cases have filtered into the public, which was particularly shocked by the exposure in the summer of 2006 of a cell composed of at least 56 members, which included uniformed members of the police and military. Even two wives of Royal Air Maroc pilots were arrested and implicated as fund-raisers for the cell. Trials for the group are scheduled to begin June 29. Inspired by international jihadist ideology, these various independent jihadist operational units have mainly been home-grown with few if any material links to transnational terror networks, although there have been several cells found to be feeding Moroccan recruits into the foreign fighter pipeline to Iraq, for eventual participation in "martyrdom operations" organized by Sunni insurgents.

¶9. (C) The fact that the Moroccan government has been able to identify and suppress numerous cells in the past three years is a tribute to the GOM's operational CT capabilities.

However, we would be foolish to assume that the GOM is catching all of them, and the fact that terror cells are appearing with increasing frequency is an alarming indicator that jihadist ideology is finding fertile ground in Morocco.

The GOM's Holistic Approach

¶10. (C) The GOM has wisely expanded the scope of its CT efforts beyond identification and disruption operations to attack the ideological and economic roots of the problem. Both the GOM and international donors are funding projects to address the economic marginalization of youth - seeking to provide them with better educational, employment, and housing opportunities. The impact of these efforts will only be felt over the mid- to long-term, however, and critics charge that the GOM's efforts to combat poverty are superficial and hampered by public corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency.

¶11. (C) The GOM has been relatively energetic on the ideological front. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs is led by an assertively moderate visionary who has sought to overhaul the country's system for regulating mosques, preachers, and religious education. A major conference in late May brought 1200 of the country's religious scholars and spiritual leaders together for a full day seminar which offered a point-by-point refutation of the tenets of extremist theology. A number of other significant innovations have been introduced, including efforts to engage with imprisoned jihadists, but on this front as well, the effort is limited both by resource shortages and entrenched reactionaries within the religious establishment.

Other Key Issues: Western Sahara and Elections

¶12. (C) Director Mueller, you will find during your stop here that the Moroccans are also preoccupied with the issue of Western Sahara. The long stalemated conflict over the territory, occupied by Morocco but also claimed by the separatist Polisario front, sheltered in Algeria, has recently seen important shifts. There were two days of direct talks between Morocco and the Polisario June 18-19. Their agreement simply to meet again in August is viewed as a success. Morocco wants the Saharans to accept autonomy, an initiative we and the international community view as serious and credible. The Moroccans may use their meetings with you

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to thank you for U.S. support and urge higher profile support for their autonomy plan for the territory, should the talks fail.

¶13. (C) This September, Morocco will hold its first direct parliamentary elections in five years. The elections are expected to be reasonably transparent and free of systematic fraud, though electoral engineering and carefully sculpted districts dictate a fairly predictable, non-threatening outcome. The Islamist Party of Justice and Development appears poised to double its representation in parliament and may garner more seats than any other party. However, no party will be able to get a majority, and the formation of another broad coalition government is a near certainty. Though the elections are of symbolic importance, political power in Morocco remains largely concentrated in the hands of the Palace, and the King has the power to appoint or dismiss the Prime Minister, other Ministers, and even dissolve parliament at will.

Narcotics: A Domestic Success Story

¶14. (C) You may want to congratulate your GOM interlocutors

on the government,s recent accomplishments in reducing cannabis cultivation. In 2005, Morocco produced 53,400 metric tons of cannabis, down from 98,000 the previous year, and in 2006 succeeded in completely eliminated cannabis production in the northern province of Larache, according to government data verified by the UN. A 2006 GOM investigation into the network of a major drug baron arrested in the north resulted in the arrest of more than a dozen high-ranking government, judicial, military and law enforcement officials linked to narcotics-related corruption. Despite aggressive government efforts to combat cannabis production, Morocco remains one of the world,s largest producers and exporters of the drug.

What More We Can Do to Help

¶15. (C) Director Mueller, I would urge you above all to use this visit to thank and congratulate the Moroccans on their energetic and focused pursuit of the war on terror. The coordination and information exchange relationship we enjoy with Moroccan security services is consistently first rate. Our Moroccan colleagues have proven themselves motivated and capable in fighting terror, but they still face limitations imposed by resource shortfalls and gaps in training, equipment, and institutional capacity. An FBI explosives expert who visited following the April bombings identified some basic equipment and training that would help the Moroccans establish a bomb disposal unit that meets modern standards. The Embassy is currently working with Washington to secure funding to enhance Morocco's EOD capabilities, and I hope we can count on your support in making this happen. I encourage you to press the Moroccans to provide us with more specific information on their priorities for assistance that would enhance their CT capabilities.

¶16. (C) Thank you for including Morocco on your itinerary. We look forward to a successful and productive visit.

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